

“Israel: Pressure on civil society grows”

Note: The text below is an authorized English translation of the press release published by Misereor under the title [“Israel: Druck auf Zivilgesellschaft wächst”](#) on 31st August 2023.

Misereor is CIDSE's German member organisation.

Aachen (August 31, 2023). In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the scope for civil society engagement is becoming ever narrower. Misereor draws attention to this on the occasion of the awarding of the Aachen Peace Prize this Friday to its Israeli partner organization "Human Rights Defenders Fund" (HRDF). The Catholic development cooperation agency is calling on the German government to work to ensure that human rights organizations in the Middle East can continue to carry out their work in a safe environment and that their activities are not paralyzed by restrictive laws.

The HRDF is being honored in Aachen for its tireless work for human rights, democracy and a peaceful and just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Founded in 2011, the organization supports human rights defenders and human rights organizations in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory who are intimidated, threatened or arrested for their work. "Anyone who campaigns for the preservation of human rights, who demonstrates non-violently, must expect to be arbitrarily arrested in Israel and the Palestinian territory," says Pirmin Spiegel, Chief Executive of Misereor. "Systematic harassment and repression against people who take a critical stance on the Israeli government's policies in the occupied territory is occurring again and again."

Non-profit status at stake

With funding from Misereor, the HRDF supports human rights defenders* to continue their work despite many legal and personal risks and to defend themselves against prosecution, including in court. The Misereor partner is also working to ensure that human rights organizations can continue to receive unhindered financial support, including from abroad. Recently, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced its intention to take action against organizations "that promote terrorist or other hostile activities under the guise of humanitarian work." According to Misereor's assessment, this announcement could have far-reaching negative consequences for both Palestinian and Israeli organizations whose focus is on human rights violations in the occupied territory. In addition, the current Israeli government's coalition agreement stipulates that a nonprofit organization that "interferes in the internal affairs of the State of Israel" and receives funding from a "foreign state entity" would no longer be considered a nonprofit and would have to pay a 65 percent tax on its foreign state contributions.

Peace and reconciliation work at risk

Following the Israeli government's October 2021 classification of six Palestinian non-governmental organizations as "terrorist organizations," which was strongly criticized internationally, Misereor believes this would be another step that would jeopardize human rights work in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the aforementioned bill is passed by parliament, "it would hinder peace and reconciliation work, advocacy for minority rights, as well as anti-discrimination and anti-occupation work by Israeli and Palestinian civil society," Spiegel warns. "I therefore call on the German government to stand up for an independent civil society and respect for human rights and international law, and to oppose further weakening of Israeli and Palestinian civil society."